

The Recycling of Time and The End of History

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Abstract

This paper uses an aspect of Baudrillard's ideas on time and history to pose a critique to the idea, associated with Fukuyama, that history ends in liberal democracy. The paper examines the relationship between Baudrillard's theory of the recycling of time and history and a Modernist-Enlightenment conception of time and history, where history is moved by a universal, transcendental and metaphysical force and is a teleological process. The paper attempts to produce a dialogue between these two conceptions of history and show how Baudrillard's theory of the recycling of time and history can be used to nuance, modify and enhance theorising about the movement of time and history, whilst recognising the theoretical plausibility of a Modernist-Enlightenment conception of history. The paper shows that Baudrillard's theory on the recycling of history problematizes the theory of a teleological history. However, I conclude by suggesting that questioning the concept of a teleological theory of history does not mean that this conception of history must be dismantled. Instead, I argue that Baudrillard's ideas on the movement of time and history can be used to modify, reconceptualise and improve the theory that liberal democracy is the end of history.

Introduction

This paper examines the relationship between Baudrillard's theory of the recycling of time and history and a Modernist-Enlightenment conception of time and history, where history is moved by a universal, transcendental and metaphysical force and is a teleological process. The paper is an attempt to use an aspect of Baudrillard's ideas on time and history to pose a critique to the idea that history ends in liberal democracy. It does not seek to provide an exposition of Baudrillard's thought; instead, it seeks to use ideas in his thinking to formulate a potential critique a teleological conception of history. The paper attempts to produce a dialogue between these two conceptions of history and show how Baudrillard's theory of the recycling of time and history can be used to nuance, modify and enhance theorising about the movement of time and history, whilst recognising the theoretical plausibility of a Modernist-Enlightenment conception of history. The paper shows that Baudrillard's theory on the recycling of history problematizes the theory of a teleological history; however, the paper concludes by suggesting that calling into question the concept of a teleological theory of history does not mean the concept must be dismantled; instead, it is argued that this conception of time and history should be re-described and re-positioned. This attempt to use postmodern ideas¹ to call a discourse into question not to debunk the theory, but to re-articulate and re-position the term is typical of many parts of postmodern literature.²

¹ For the purposes of this paper, I am aligning the idea of the recycling of history with postmodern thought, since the notion of the recycling of time/history stands in stark contrast to the Modernist-Enlightenment notion of progress and optimism.

² For instance, Derrida's theory of deconstruction does not so much seek to invert binary logic, as allow for its replacement by a third term (in particular, see: Jacques Derrida, Positions, (revised/second edition) (translated by Alan Bass), (London: Continuum, 2002), pp41-44). Butler frequently and explicitly argues that to call a term into question, does not mean it must be debunked; but merely that the term cannot function in the same way as it did; (esp. see: Judith Butler, Undoing Gender, (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), pp174-203) thus, to deconstruct a subject is not to do away with it but to call it into question, and most importantly, to open it up (Judith Butler, "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of "Postmodernism", in Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, eds., Feminists Theorize The Political, (New York; London: Routledge, 1992)).

Before I explore the relationship between Baudrillard's theory of the recycling of time and a Modernist-Enlightenment theory of a universal and teleological history, I will contextualise the theory of the recycling of history within theories about the movement of time and history. Thus, the first section of the paper focuses on the relationship between the notion of the recycling of time and the ancient idea of history as cyclical. I show that while Baudrillard's theory of the recycling of history can, initially, seem to be located and rooted within this tradition, his theory is better understood as expanding on the idea of a cyclical history. I also explore what is distinctive and valuable in Baudrillard's theory of the recycling of history.

The paper then examines the relationship between the recycling of history and the idea that history can or has reached an end point of perfection. Although the idea of history reaching an end point does not necessarily imply that we reach a perfect social/political order, Modernist-Enlightenment conceptions of history rely on the notion of the end point of history being a social/political order which is free from contradictions, the embodiment of a geist and thus a point of perfection. The paper contrasts Baudrillard's theory of the recycling of history with Fukuyama's theory of the end of history, since Fukuyama is the clearest example of a recent thinker to follow the Modernist-Enlightenment tradition of producing a teleological account of history. In the same way that this paper is not an exposition of Baudrillard's theories on time and history, but an attempt to utilise ideas in his thought as a critique to the concept of a teleological history, this paper should not be seen as an exposition of Fukuyama, per se, but an examination of the idea that liberal democracy is the end of history. Fukuyama's teleological conception of history is somewhat distinctive since, in addition to

claiming that history can reach an end point of perfection, he also claims that we have reached this point.

The paper then concludes by trying to connect Baudrillard's critique of reaching the end point of a teleological process to Fukuyama's Modernist-Enlightenment theory of history in a productive manner. I claim that the construction of a binary between Modernist-Enlightenment theories and Baudrillard's postmodern thought prevents potentially constructive conversations in contemporary political theory, since a postmodern framework can be used to supplement, nuance and enhance Modernist-Enlightenment theories. I conclude that Baudrillard's ideas on the movement of time and history can be used to modify, reconceptualise and improve upon Fukuyama's theory that liberal democracy is the end of history. I show that the possible co-existence of Fukuyama's and Baudrillard's differing accounts of history enhance ways of theorizing about the process of history, since history does not need to be seen as purely dissolving into the order of the recyclable, nor does it need to be seen as purely teleological. Ultimately, I argue that Baudrillard's ideas provide a way of strengthening Fukuyama's theory by nuancing Fukuyama's claim that history ends in liberal democracy. Thus my conclusion represents a radical break with typical postmodern thinking, since I claim that it is possible to construct a universal, metaphysical, teleological history using postmodern thought/theory, whereas postmodernists typically reject this Modernist-Enlightenment conception of history.³

³ The idea that it is not possible to construct a universal, metaphysical, teleological history is central to the work of many postmodern thinkers, not just Baudrillard. For instance, Foucault argues that he positions himself against a "total" history. Derrida argues that his theory of history is written against the idea of "telos". Lyotard positions himself against certainty and any closure over the future. Brown argues that history cannot be understood as a stream linking past and future; and, instead, history is characterised by discontinuities. Ermarth argues against a dialectical understanding of time and history, and claims that this is an "inauthentic" account of history; and, instead, offers a notion of "rhythmic time".

A Cyclical History and The Recycling of History

The view that history is *not* teleological and *not* governed by a geist is an ancient one. For instance, Aristotle and Machiavelli epitomise the cyclical theory of history, since their theories of history are based on the argument that no social/political system is stable and humans, therefore, cycle between regimes. It was in the Enlightenment, and particularly with Kant and Hegel that the idea of a universal and teleological history was fully developed. Thus one way out of Modernist-Enlightenment theories of history is to look back at notions of history that existed prior to this period. For instance, Kristol advises us that the best way, 'to liberate oneself from... Hegelian sensibility and mode of thought is to go back to Aristotle, and to his understanding that all forms of government... are inherently unstable, that all political regimes are transitional, that the stability of all regimes is corrupted by the corrosive power of time.'⁴ Cyclical theories of time, as Hutchings explains, are in contrast to the Christian view of time, which is also based on a universal and teleological conception of history, where time follows a single, irreversible trajectory from Creation to Apocalypse; whereas, the cyclical theory of time is based on classical cosmology, where all aspects of the world are temporally organised in a cyclical pattern of birth and death, rise and fall, growth and decay, and structured in relation to the movement of the planets.⁵

Baudrillard's idea that time and history is recycling/repeating itself has many parallels to Aristotle and Machiavelli's concept of a cyclical history, which is why I begin by examining classical thinkers. However, I also want to draw attention to the limitations of the cyclical theory of history, as expressed by Aristotle and Machiavelli, and show how Baudrillard's theory of the recycling of history expands and refines this theory. It is also worth noting that

⁴ Irving Kristol, "Responses to Fukuyama", (The National Interest, Summer 1989).

⁵ Kimberly Hutchings, Time and World Politics, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), p30.

a number of recent thinkers have appeared to endorse a cyclical theory of history, without explicitly bringing in this concept of time. For instance, Mouffe argues that we cannot find final answers or solutions to ethical questions due to an ever-present antagonism in the system, since 'violence is ineradicable'.⁶ The implication of Mouffe's theory appears to be a conclusion that we can never reach an end to history, since there can be no perfect social/political system. Therefore, it would seem that history is a cyclical process. However, Mouffe does not explicitly claim that humans are forever condemned to cycle through systems of thought, forever searching for a solution to violence and antagonism. Thus it is not really clear what Mouffe's conception of the process, flow and unfolding of time entails. Given that Mouffe also argues that democracy is the best system for dealing with irresolvable, violent and antagonistic conflict, there is also some implication of a Hegelian end of history, since her argument suggests that if democracy is the best way of dealing with antagonism and violence then democracy is the end of history.

Mouffe's idea of innate conflict or "violence" between groups with different interests can be seen as the basis for constructing a cyclical theory of history; although, as I have argued, it does not need to be interpreted in this way. Similar to Mouffe's idea of ineradicable violence is Aristotle and Machiavelli ideas of a perpetual conflict between different bodies of men. It is this idea which led them to the conclusion that history cycled through different regimes. They argued human societies circulated between regimes of government which looked to the common interest and those which had been corrupted and only looked toward the interests of a particular body of men. For both Aristotle and Machiavelli, there are 3 types of government:

⁶ In particular, see: Chantal Mouffe, The Democratic Paradox, (London: New York: Verso, 2000), p132.

- Rule by one
- Rule by the few
- Rule by the many.

These three types of government subdivide into six forms of government. Each of the three types of government has two corresponding forms of government; one of which is “good”, and one of which is “bad”,⁷ as indicated in the following series of tables:

⁷ Aristotle and Machiavelli lay out their theory of the 3 types of rule and 6 forms of government in several places. In particular, see: Aristotle, The Politics of Aristotle, (Translated with Notes by Ernest Barker), (Oxford; London: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1948), Book III, Chapter 7, paragraphs 3 & 5; Book IV, Chapter 2, Paragraph 1 and Niccolo Machiavelli, The Discourses, (Edited and Introduced by B Crick; Translated L Walker with Revisions by B Richardson), (London: Penguin Books, 2003), Book II, Discourse 2.

Aristotle⁸

Number of Rulers	Good Form	Perverse Form
1	Kingship	Tyranny
Few	Aristocracy	Oligarchy
Many	Polity	Democracy

Machiavelli⁹

Number of Rulers	Good Form	Perverse Form
1	Principality	Tyranny
Few	Aristocracy	Oligarchy
Many	Democracy	Anarchy

To simplify this debate, I have synthesised Aristotle and Machiavelli's terminology in the following way:

My Terminology¹⁰

Number of Rulers	Good Form	Perverse Form
1	Monarchy	Tyranny
Few	Aristocracy	Oligarchy
Many	Polity	Anarchy

⁸ Aristotle, *The Politics of Aristotle*, Book III, Chapter 7, paragraphs 3 & 5; Book IV, Chapter 2, Paragraph 1.

⁹ Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, Book II, Discourse 2.

¹⁰ I use Monarchy to replace Kingship/Principality as this seems to be a neutral term, synonymous with both. I avoid using "democracy" as this is used in opposite ways by Aristotle and Machiavelli; thus the two writers conceive of democracy in different ways and use it to mean different things. Also, both Aristotle and Machiavelli's notions of democracy are very different from the way we conceive of modern liberal democracy. Therefore, I simply want to avoid using democracy, since any use of "democracy" could cause confusion. I feel polity best expresses the "good" form of rule by the many, and anarchy best expresses the "perverse" form of rule by the many.

The primary idea which I take from both Aristotle and Machiavelli's theory of government and history is that there is no *one* good type of government. Rule by one, rule by the few and rule by the many can all be "good", or have a "good" form. The three "good" forms are, to use Mouffe's terminology, characterised by their balancing of conflict and antagonism; or, to use Aristotle and Machiavelli's terminology, they are characterised by their ability to look to the common good/interest/wealth.¹¹ The three "bad" forms of government, or "perversions" of the three "good" forms of government, are defined by their refusal to look to the common good/interest – they are *not* directed to the 'advantage of the whole body of citizens.'¹²

For Aristotle and Machiavelli history is cyclical, because the "good" form of government slips into the "bad" form of government, and then this "bad" form of government is overthrown. Aristotle and Machiavelli both argue that it is inevitable that the "good" form of government will be perverted and pass into the "bad" form, since whenever one 'sets up one of the three first forms of government... [it] will last but for a while, since there are no means whereby to prevent it passing to its contrary'¹³. This sets up a notion of a cyclical history, because the "good" form can always be expected to slip into its corrupted/"bad" form; subsequently, this malign form of government will be overthrown in favour of one of the other types of government in its good form, and then the cycle will repeat itself, again. This cyclical view of history argues two things: firstly, that there is no *one* "good" social/political

¹¹ Aristotle, in Aristotle, The Politics of Aristotle, Book III, Chapter 7, paragraph 3, explicitly defines the 3 "good" forms of government by their ability to look to the common interest. This idea of looking to the common good and rising above class interest is present throughout Aristotle's work. It is also prevalent throughout Machiavelli's work, but is elucidated, especially, clearly in relation to the various types of government in Machiavelli, The Discourses, Book II, Discourse 2.

¹² For quote, see: Aristotle, The Politics of Aristotle, Book III, Chapter 7, paragraph 5. However, this idea/definition of the "perverse" form of government re-occurs throughout Aristotle's work and in Machiavelli's *The Discourses*.

¹³ Machiavelli, The Discourses, Book II, Discourse 2.

system i.e. there is no *one* social/political order which satisfies humanity as various forms of government are “good”; secondly, there is a perennial passing/slipping from “good” to “bad” regimes and subsequent overthrowing of “bad” regimes.

The concept of a cyclical history is given a distinctly postmodern twist by Baudrillard, who argues that history is recycling itself. For Baudrillard, it is not so much that we live in a cyclical history where we cycle through regimes/systems of government, but rather that ideas and values return. Horrocks provides a good summary of Baudrillard’s notion of the recycling of time and history: for Baudrillard, Horrocks argues, history is rifling through its own dustbins, dusting off its rubbish and re-circulating old ideologies, values and regimes.¹⁴ History, Baudrillard argues, has ‘wretched itself free from cyclical time into the order of the recyclable’¹⁵; history is not a process circulating between regimes/forms of government, but a process re-iterating past ideas. Baudrillard sees history as “ghostly”, because as history repeats itself, what we experience are “ghost events”, “cloned events”, “farcical events”, “phantom events”, since the second event is a debased form of the original; for example, Baudrillard describes Napoleon III as a “grotesque stand-in” for Napoleon I.¹⁶

Baudrillard’s theory of the recycling of history, clearly, has a close relationship with the idea of a cyclical history, since he also sees history as a series of repetitions and re-iterations, with a recycling of past systems of thought and regimes of government. However, Baudrillard’s theory dispenses with the strict characterisation of pairs of good and bad forms of government and the subsequent notion of a systematic cycling between systems of thought

¹⁴ Christopher Horrocks, Baudrillard and the Millennium, (Cambridge: Icon Books, 1999), pp23-24.

¹⁵ Jean Baudrillard, Jean, The Illusion of the End (translated by Chris Turner), (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), p27.

¹⁶ Jean Baudrillard, “The End of the Millennium or The Countdown”, *Theory, Culture, Society*, (1998), 15 (1).

and regimes of government. Instead, Baudrillard's theory is based on the idea that old values return to the surface, and repeat themselves. Thus, Baudrillard's theory of the recycling of history produces a less structured and organised theory of time than cyclical theories of history produce because events and the repetition of values is more random. Thus, history, rather than passing through cycles, is something which is loopy and fragmented, unstructured and punctuated by returns.

The Recycling of History and The End of History

I will now move on and argue that the idea of history recycling itself has some merit, since old ideas and systems of thought are recycled and do re-occur. However, I also want to argue that, whilst history contains elements of circulatory and repetition, it is possible to produce a theory of a universal and teleological history. In this section, I explore the relationship between the idea of the recycling of history and ideas of an end of history; and, then, in the final section of the paper, I explore how these two theories can be brought into co-existence, and how the theory of the recycling of history can nuance, modify and enhance the idea of an end of history.

The concept of history repeating and recycling itself can, implicitly, be seen in Huntington's objections to Fukuyama, although he does not use this language.¹⁷ Huntington argues that an idea may fade in one generation, only to reappear in another.¹⁸ There are many examples of ideas which have "staged a comeback"; for instance, during the 1940s-1960s, classical economic liberalism seemed dead – replaced by Keynesian economics – but by the

¹⁷ Huntington is no postmodernist, but he is one of Fukuyama's archest critics.

¹⁸ See: Samuel Huntington, "No Exit", (The National Interest, Fall 1989).

end of the 1970s, classical economic liberalism had re-emerged as the dominant idea. However, this type of example does not pose a real challenge to the idea of an end of history, since the detail of an economic system does not refute the possibility of an end ideology because both Keynesian economics and classical liberal economics are compatible with liberal democracy. The detailed appearance of liberal democracy and its particular shade of colour may change over time; and these modifications and changes to the detail of the system suggest that liberal democracy, as a concept, is not static but capable of reform. However, this does not mean there will necessarily be a recycling and repeating of previous regimes and systems of thought.

The concept of a universal and teleological history is, however, challenged if it is possible to imagine the recycling or “coming back” of ideas which constitute the basis for a different social/political system e.g. religion, nationalism and ethnic identity. In all these cases, the idea *can* be assimilated with liberal democracy e.g. a resurgence in Scottish or Welsh Nationalism can be accommodated within liberal democracy, but a resurgence in fascist-Nazi style Nationalism could not be accommodated within a liberal democracy. Similarly, a resurgence in moderate Christian or Muslim groups which emphasise traditional values e.g. the values of the Christian Right in the US may be accommodated by liberal democracy, but fundamentalist terrorists or other extreme religious groups cannot be assimilated within a liberal democracy. Since we are, continually, bearing witness to the recycling of past systems of belief/thought, it is worth elucidating the merits of a history which moves by recycling itself, and asking: if history involves repetition, is it credible to posit a theory of a universal and teleological history?

Rather oddly, Baudrillard does seem to think we are at the end of history;¹⁹ however, he does not claim that we have reached this point by following the will of a universal geist and then subsequently satisfying this driving force behind the historical process, as is the case in Modernist-Enlightenment theories of history. Although Baudrillard argues that we have reached an end of history, it is only a “sort of” end of history which we reach in Baudrillard’s theory because he paradoxically argues that whilst we have reached the end of history, history is continuing to unfold.²⁰ For Baudrillard events are no longer happening, because events are merely a stand-in for past events; this does constitute a sort of end, since instead of producing new directions, history is condemned to recycle old ideas and values.

Baudrillard, like Fukuyama, argues that the fall of the Berlin Wall marked the end of history. However, rather than reaching a social/political system which satisfies the human spirit, we are now recycling history: ‘the last great “historical” event – the fall of the Berlin Wall – signified an immense repentance on the part of history which, rather than heading off towards fresh perspectives, seems instead to be splintering into scattered fragments and reactivating phases of events and conflicts we thought had gone.’²¹ Baudrillard colourfully elucidates his vision of history recycling itself in flamboyant language: ‘when ice freezes, all the excrement rises to surface [i.e.]... when the future is deep-frozen... we see all the excrement come up from the past.’²² Thus, history’s great ruse is to have concealed its end by making us believe we are continuing to make it.²³ Baudrillard’s theory of time and history

¹⁹ In particular, see: Baudrillard, The Illusion of the End, p21-22; Baudrillard, “The End of the Millennium”; Jean Baudrillard, “The Anorexic Ruins” in Dietmar Kamper and Christoph Wulf, eds., Looking Back on the End of the World, (New York; Semiotext(e), 1989); Jean Baudrillard, “The Year 2000 Will Not Take Place”, in E. A. Grosz, Terry Threadgold, David Kelly, Alan Cholodenko, and Edward Colless, eds., Futur*Fall: Excursions into Post-modernity, (Sydney: University of Sydney Press, 1986).

²⁰ In particular, see: Baudrillard, The Illusion of the End, p115-123.

²¹ Baudrillard, “The End of the Millennium”, p3.

²² Baudrillard, The Illusion of the End, p26.

²³ Baudrillard, “The End of the Millennium or The Countdown”.

claims that we have reached an end of sorts, because there is the absence of the possibility of new possibilities; however, this does not introduce the idea of an end point in a teleological sense. For Baudrillard, although we are at a sort of end, this end point is not based on the notion of progress or reaching a point where a geist is satisfied.²⁴ Thus, we have two conceptions of an end of history: one, Baudrillard's notion that history ends because there is an absence of new possibilities; and, two, a Modernist-Enlightenment notion of an end of history, where history ends because we have reached an end point of perfection through the realization of a geist.

The theory of the recycling of history appears to be premised on the notion that there is no geist or directional force behind the process of history; therefore, it does not seem possible to talk about or construct a universal and teleological history. Instead, history reaches an end point for Baudrillard simply because it has no where to go and ends up recycling itself: 'defunct ideologies, bygone utopias, dead concepts and fossilized ideas... [will] continue to pollute our mental space.'²⁵ However Baudrillard's notion of history is not quite as one-dimensional as this, since he paradoxically holds the view that history has not ended and that we cannot speak of an end, because there is no end and will be no end, since all things 'will continue to unfold slowly, tediously, recurrently, in that hysteresis of everything which like nails and hair continues to grow after death.'²⁶ However, what it is important to take from Baudrillard's reading of history is that whilst events and things will happen and ideas will grow, everything is essentially already dead. The only history we have is a history which moves by recycling itself, since there is an absence of new possibilities.

²⁴ Indeed, Baudrillard's theory of time and history seems to be positioned against the idea of a geist.

²⁵ Baudrillard, The Illusion of the End, p26.

²⁶ Baudrillard, The Illusion of the End, p116.

Baudrillard's concept of history has much to offer us, since it is easy to see echoes of the past re-iterated in the present and values/ideas which we thought were dead recycling themselves. For instance, we have witnessed a resurrection in neo-fascist Nationalism in the developed Western world e.g. when Le Penn made into the final run-off for the French Presidency. We have also witnessed the re-awakening of fundamentalist religious views; most notably, the extreme Islamic fundamentalism of al-Qaeda, but also Christian movements (most active in the US), which advocate orthodox/traditional values. However, whilst there is a recycling of concepts in time and history, it may not be necessary to debunk Fukuyama's notion of history, since for Fukuyama history is a long process and there will be meanders, detours and aberrations in the course of history. Thus, it is only to be expected that past ideas will bubble up and re-emerge. As I argue in the next section, it is possible to see the recycling of ideas in history not as a threat to the idea that there is a geist behind history; and, instead, to use Baudrillard's ideas about the repetition of ideas and values and the recycling of history to re-conceptualise Enlightenment theories of a teleological history.

Reconciling The Recycling of History and Modernist-Enlightenment

Theories of History

I begin this section by elucidating the theory of a teleological history, where history follows the will of a geist and culminates with the realization of the geist in a final and perfect social/political order. This theory has its origins in Kant, Hegel and Marx, but since Fukuyama is the theorist to most recently propose this theory and also, somewhat uniquely, to claim that we have reached the end of history, I will focus on Fukuyama's theory of history. In this discussion of Fukuyama's theory of history, I do two things. Firstly, I elucidate what,

for Fukuyama, acts as the geist behind history; secondly, I explain why Fukuyama believes that we have reached the end of history and why liberal democracy satisfies the geist.

Fukuyama's project of writing a universal and teleological history is straight out of the Modernist-Enlightenment tradition of constructing a progressive history. Fukuyama acknowledges that he is a follower of Hegel, for whom 'the universal history of mankind was nothing other than man's progressive rise to full rationality'²⁷. It is important to highlight the two ideas which underpin Fukuyama's particular concept of history. First, is the idea that there is something universal to all humanity and history: 'a universal history of mankind is... an attempt to find a meaningful pattern in the overall development of human societies'²⁸. Second, is the idea that there is a forward-moving direction to history; history progresses from one (a lower) form of social/political order to a new (a higher) social/political order: 'history proceeds through a continual process of conflict, wherein systems of thought as well as political systems collide and fall apart from their own internal contradictions. They are then replaced by less contradictions and therefore higher ones'²⁹.

Fukuyama's theory of the movement and process of history is based on the idea that historical movement has direction as a consequence of a universal desire for: economic development, the innovations of science, technology and modernization since these enable us to make life more comfortable and secure. Fukuyama argues that history moves in a single coherent direction as a consequence of the unfolding of modern natural science,³⁰ because

²⁷ Francis Fukuyama, The End of History and The Last Man, (London: Penguin, 1992) p60.

²⁸ Fukuyama, EHLM, p55.

²⁹ Fukuyama, EHLM, p60.

³⁰ This is critical to Fukuyama's argument and he refers to this in several places. In particular, see: Fukuyama, EHLM, pp80-81.

science produces a single coherent direction since it produces modernization, which in turn produces security, prosperity and greater comfort, and it is the desire for these by-products of modernization which actually provide a single coherent direction to history, rather than science or even modernization, per se: it is ‘the desire for economic growth [which is]... a universal characteristic of virtually all present-day societies’³¹.

Essentially, Fukuyama’s argument is the claim that there is a directional course behind history due to the human desire for the products of modernization. By establishing a geist to history’s direction, Fukuyama argues that a social/political system which satisfies this geist would be the end of history; thus satisfying the desire for modernization would end history. However, Fukuyama does not argue that the social/political system which satisfies the desire for modernization is the end of history, because he argues humans are also driven by non-material/thymotic desires.³² The desire for modernization merely illustrates how the concept of a geist operates and the process where a universal mechanism governs humans and historical movement. However, because humans have desires which are not entirely material, a social/political system which provides the most effective means for modernization is not the end of history in Fukuyama’s theory. Instead, the society at the end of history must also satisfy the human desire for the ‘recognition of our freedom’³³. Essentially, Fukuyama’s theory, as Bertram and Chitty elucidate, relies on the existence of this second geist behind the direction of history, and this shifts the groundwork of history, since ‘a crypto-Marxist explanation has yielded pride of place to a neo-Hegelian one.’³⁴

³¹ Fukuyama, EHLM, p81.

³² The desire for the products of modernization is a material desire. Fukuyama argues that humans also have other desires e.g. the desire for recognition. He labels these as desires arising from thymos i.e. thymotic desires.

³³ Fukuyama, EHLM, p200.

³⁴ Christopher Bertram and Andrew Chitty, “Introduction” in Christopher Bertram & Andrew Chitty (eds.), Has History Ended? Fukuyama, Marx Modernity, (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 1994), pp2-3.

In this paper, I am not concerned with the content of the social/political order at the end of history, and thus I will not examine the claim that liberal democracy is the end of history. Therefore, I do not seek to elaborate on the second *geist* in Fukuyama's theory. My concern in this paper is whether it is possible to conceive of a history moved by a universal *geist*; and thus, a history, at least theoretically, with an end point. Therefore, my focus will be on the desire for modernization, since the desire for modernization illustrates how, in theory, history can be governed by a universal mechanism. This then allows for a concept of a teleological history, and the idea that a social/political order could be established which brings about the emancipation or realization of this *geist* and thus brings the process of history to an end.

I accept Fukuyama's claim that humans would be unwilling to quit modern society and reject technology and thus it is possible to produce a theory of a universal *geist* and a universal history, which at least, theoretically, has an end point. Fukuyama takes on and dismantles the arguments of writers who suggest that the process of modernization and progress of science is not inevitable and could be reversed; for instance, he argues against Rousseau and environmentalists whom he claims have argued that man is unhappy with the conquest of nature through science/technology and would be happier living as a natural man in a natural world.³⁵ There are individuals who do reject the process of modernization,³⁶ however, it can be claimed that there exists a human desire for the things which make life more comfortable and this provides a directional force to history, because groups and individuals which do not seek modernization and a more comfortable life are anomalies

³⁵ See: Fukuyama, *EHLM*, Chapter 7: *No Barbarians at the Gates*, pp82-88.

³⁶ There are a variety of examples of individuals and groups who have opted out of the process of modernization, including: the Amish community, the individual who chooses a monastic life, the individual who gives up his/her job to farm in Africa etc.

within the human specie, and there is nothing that can be entirely universal. As Fukuyama points out no characteristic has a variance/standard deviation of zero e.g. there are doubtless mutant female Kangaroos who do not have pouches;³⁷ thus any account of human desire is the idea that human desire ‘is the sum of the behaviour and characteristics that are *typical* of human the human species’³⁸. Therefore, the example of a particular group or individual that does not desire modernization does not invalidate the claim that it is possible to produce a universal geist moving human nature and history.

Fukuyama rejects the claim that man could be happier as a natural man in a natural world, because whilst humans may once have been satisfied with this kind of existence, having experienced the comforts of modern society, humans would not be willing to go back to a world of subsistence living.³⁹ In a rather vitriolic swipe at postmodernism, Fukuyama states this point: ‘the postmodernist professor who asserts that there is no coherent direction to history would most likely never contemplate leaving his comfortable surroundings in Paris, New Haven or Irvine and moving to Somalia; he would not raise his children under the hygienic conditions prevailing in Burundi’⁴⁰. Whilst I wish to engage with postmodern theory in a way in which Fukuyama does not, I accept that there is a universal human desire for a comfortable standard of living. I would go further and be prepared to argue that even people living in the underdeveloped world wish to escape their impoverishment. Indeed, many of Fukuyama’s critics accept this; Von Laue, for instance, argues that worldwide optimism in liberal democracy does not make it the conscious aim of all mankind and what people want is only part of the Western world: ‘what seems to count most in that [Western]

³⁷ Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnological Revolution*, (London: Profile, 2002), p140. Italics are my own.

³⁸ Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future*, p130.

³⁹ In particular, see: Fukuyama, *EHLM*, Chapter 7: *No Barbarians at the Gates* (pp82-88).

⁴⁰ Francis Fukuyama, “Reflections on The End of History, Five Years Later”, in Timothy Burns, ed., *After History? Francis Fukuyama and his Critics*, (London: Littlefield Adams, 1994), p246.

model is the opportunity for liberation from the humiliations of backwardness, the escape from poverty and powerlessness, rather than the form of Government.’⁴¹

If it is possible to argue that people want liberation from poverty, even if it is not argued that they necessarily want liberal democracy, then it becomes possible to ascribe direction to history since there is a human desire to embrace science/technology and economic development. The argument for economic development and the desire for things which make life more comfortable is a persuasive one and it extends beyond escaping actual poverty and a subsistence level of existence. Fukuyama puts this argument lucidly: ‘in the 1920s and 30s, it was the height of consumerist aspiration for a family to own a radio. Today in contemporary America there is hardly teenager alive who does not own several, and who yet is extremely dissatisfied for not owning a Nintendo, or a portable compact disc player, or a beeper. It is obvious, moreover, that his acquisition of these items will not serve to make him any more satisfied, since by that time the Japanese will have invented some other new electronic gadget which he can aspire to own.’⁴² And, of course, Fukuyama is right; and today no one aspires to own a portable CD player – it has been replaced by the MP3 player; the original Nintendo has been replaced a third/fourth/fifth generation of “super” Nintendos, and the beeper has been entirely forgotten.

The idea that history is moved by universal human desires and a universal mechanism appears to imply that we must reject Baudrillard’s idea that history should be understood as something which has descended into the order of the recyclable. However, my intention is to

⁴¹ Theodore H. Von Laue, “From Fukuyama to Reality: A Critical Essay” in Timothy Burns, ed., *After History? Francis Fukuyama and his Critics*, (London: Littlefield Adams, 1994), p31.

⁴² Fukuyama, *EHLM*, p84.

show that there is value in Baudrillard's theory, and that we can benefit from using his theory and use it to nuance the idea that history is moved by a geist. As I stated in the Introduction, my intention is to call into question the concept of a teleological history, not to debunk or dismantle the concept; but, to show how it can be re-positioned and re-described. Although Modernist-Enlightenment and postmodern notions of the flow of time and the movement of history seem to exist in binary opposition, my aim is to show that there are moments of resonance, convergence and commonality between the two. Thus, my conclusion is that we do not need to construct a dualistic dichotomy between Modernist-Enlightenment theories of history and Baudrillard's idea of the recycling of history and that Baudrillard's theory of the recycling of history can be used to enrich Modernist-Enlightenment theories of time and history by producing a more nuanced and convincing understanding of the flow of time and history. Therefore, a revision of the teleological theory of history allows the theory to become more compelling.

The notion that previous belief systems and systems of government can be recycled is an important one, and ought to be given careful consideration. Contemporary global events frequently bear witness to the re-emergence or recycling of prior systems of thought. Thus, the notion that we cannot conceive of a universal and teleological history due to a constant recycling and re-circulating of old ideas, values and regimes is a powerful one, and one which resonates with the contemporary, especially when we witness resurgences in values such as fascist-Nationalism e.g. the improved share of the vote for the BNP in the UK, Le Pen reaching the French Presidential run-off etc. Recycled value systems such as Nationalism have even come to power in some Eastern European countries during their transition from Communism e.g. Milosevic in Yugoslavia. It is tempting to see the repetition of past ideas as the recycling of "defunct utopias" which are doomed to failure, and to

dismiss these systems as aberrations or meanders from the flow of history, and conclude that these states will eventually succumb to the Geist of history and will, in the very long-term, adopt a liberal democratic social/political system and values. However, such a simplistic dismissal of old ideas, values and beliefs does not do them justice since there may be some value in them.

The notion of a history recycling itself serves as a reminder that liberal democracy is, itself, rooted in anachronistic ideas such as Nationalism. Contemporary liberal democracies bear witness to a continual allegiance to the idea of the Nation state; for instance, British reluctance to deeper interrogation with the EU; growth in Nationalist/Separatist feeling/sentiment in Scotland, Wales, the Basque Region, Quebec etc. Liberal democracies also maintain also remain beholden to anachronistic ideas of community identities forged from traditional/orthodox values such as belonging to Christian groups; and even contemporary forms of identity often involve forming or becoming part of an organisation based on a shared identity which involves subordinating the individual's identity to the identity and values of an organisation/community e.g. football clubs, women's groups, trade unions, gay/lesbian/transgender groups etc. Thus, an awareness that the present is rooted in the past and that the future will bear witness to the recycling of past values and ideas nuances our understanding of the present and makes for a more compelling account of the flow of time and the process of history.

However, this does not mean that we must give up on the idea of a forward-moving logic to history. Fukuyama recognises that not all values in liberal democracies are modern and that old ideas/values can be valuable to the functioning of liberal democracies. He argues liberal

democracy comes out of history; and liberal democracy is ‘not entirely “modern” [because] if the institutions of democracy and capitalism are to work properly, they must co-exist with certain pre-modern cultural habits... [such as] reciprocity, moral obligation, duty toward community and trust, which are based in habit rather than moral calculation. The[y]... are not anachronisms in a modern society but rather the sine qua non of [its]... success.’⁴³ The continuance, or recycling, of old ideas such as nationalism, religion, moral duty etc is not necessarily a threat or alternative to liberal democracy, since these values can be accommodated within, and even complement and enhance, liberal democracy. Thus prior belief systems, ideas and ideologies are not things threatening to overturn history and push us into the order of the recyclable and a history characterised by the repetition of social/political systems; instead, they are things which we have to learn to make compatible with and work for the benefit of the social/political order which emerges at the end of history.

The presence of “recycled” ideas in the system at the end of history may be a necessary and natural result of the process of history. For instance, Fukuyama argues that Nationalism is a precursor to liberal democracy, since there is a need for a sense of National identity before a functioning, sovereign, liberal democratic state can emerge. Therefore, in the post-cold war era Nationalist struggles in the USSR, the third world and Yugoslavia can all be seen as part of a transitional state of affairs, and a parallel can be drawn between these Nationalist struggles and the situation in 19th Century Europe.⁴⁴ Thus, Nationalist struggles can be seen as a part of the course of history, and Nationalist values as crucial and foundational to liberal democracy. It also possible to argue that, despite the inherent individualism in liberal democratic thought, communitarian and social habits are present in liberal democratic states,

⁴³ Francis Fukuyama, *Trust*, (London: Penguin, 1995), p11.

⁴⁴ Francis Fukuyama, “Liberal Democracy as a Global Phenomenon” (*Political Science and Politics*, (1991), 24 (4)), pp663-664.

since people are prepared to subordinate their individualism to associate in voluntary groups;⁴⁵ an example of this would be the willingness of citizens to forego the possibility of making their relationship with religion a purely private matter; and, instead, to form voluntary groups i.e. Churches etc which necessitate the subordination of one's individualism to pursue the objective of that group/church. Thus, the values of the social/political order at the end of history seem to be supplemented by anachronistic or recycled ideas. However, in reality, values and belief systems from the past can be seen to enhance the functioning of the social/political order at the end of history, since they provide a sense of identity and purpose for its citizens.

Fukuyama's theory of history resonates closely with the idea that the past is recycled. However, Fukuyama is still able to argue that there is a universal mechanism – the desires for modernization and recognition – which provides a forward-moving direction. It is also important to recognise that Fukuyama's theory of history is a long-termist one. He argues that history is universal and moving toward an end point; but he argues that whilst history has a course, it experiences meanders, detours and aberrations. Fukuyama argues explicitly that the presence of old ideologies in some countries such as Milosevic's Yugoslavia do not represent a counter-argument to his thesis, since some countries will stand outside the evolutionary process.⁴⁶ Fukuyama's argument is one which claims there are blips in the process of history – he even describes the Holocaust as a bizarre blip,⁴⁷ one which does not refute the idea that there is 'an evolutionary logic to human history... lead[ing] the most

⁴⁵ In particular, see: Francis Fukuyama, "Confucianism and Democracy", (*Journal of Democracy* (1995), 6 (2).

⁴⁶ In particular, see: Francis Fukuyama, "Second Thoughts: The Last Man in a Bottle" (*The National Interest*, Summer 1999).

⁴⁷ Fukuyama, *EHLM*, p128.

advanced countries to liberal democracy'⁴⁸. Thus it is important to realise that although history is universal and forward-moving it is not linear and not always forward-moving; however, over the course of time, history is progressing, since there is a universal mechanism – the twin desires for modernization and recognition – and these establish a universal direction to history. But, because history is not always forward-moving, 'we should not be surprised if all of the formerly Communist countries do not make a rapid and smooth transition to stable [liberal] democracy.'⁴⁹ This concept of history argues that the detail of events are not important, since what matters is the idea that history is following a course and there is a progressive, evolutionary sweep to history; and this is because 'the only coherent ideology that enjoys widespread legitimacy... remains liberal democracy.'⁵⁰ Therefore the idea of a recycled history is consistent with Fukuyama's idea of a history with a course, since the teleological process of history is not linear but meandering and loopy.

Conclusion

What can be taken from this discussion is a nuancing and refining of the idea that history has a forward-moving direction. It is still possible to posit the argument that there is a course behind history, but this does not mean that history is always forward-moving – values and ideas will be recycled, and some of these recycled values and ideas are an aspect of functioning liberal democracies.

Although the idea of the repetition and recycling of phases of history was always present in Fukuyama's theory of a long-term history, which contained blips and aberrations,

⁴⁸ Fukuyama, "Second Thoughts".

⁴⁹ Fukuyama, EHLM, p36.

⁵⁰ Fukuyama, EHLM, p37

Baudrillard's ideas provide a nuancing to the conception of a history which is forward-moving. History can only be seen as forward-moving in the sense that there is a course which it is following; however, the historical process is meandering and moves through loops and repetition, and does not always progress. Thus, the idea of history recycling itself deepens the idea of a universal, forward-moving history rather than replaces it and adds to our understanding of time and the historical process. In order to understand the complexity of the historical process, history cannot be seen as purely linear, as suggested in Modernist-Enlightenment theories; instead, history is loopy and convoluted. A teleological theory of history, such as Fukuyama's, may rest on the idea of a universal geist which is seeking to be realized, but the course of events, like true love, does not run smoothly. The process of the geist becoming realized is not always a forward-moving process and history will bear witness to the recycling of past ideas, values and belief systems. If it was a road, history would not be a Roman road going straight from A to B; instead, history would be a country lane meandering and weaving about, even doubling back on itself before reaching its end point. And, for those embarking on that course, traces of the experience of the journey would become embedded in the end point; thus values which seem anachronistic and derived from the past may be essential to the functioning of the system which emerges at the end of history. For instance, if liberal democracy is the end of history, it is embedded with ideas of Nationalism, kinship and community belonging etc.

Despite the apparent recycling of ideas, values and belief systems, it remains conceivable that there could be a geist behind the movement of history. It is possible to conceive of a universal mechanism and universal desire in human nature, such as the twin desires for modernization and recognition; and to, therefore, argue that history is seeking to find a social/political order which satisfies or realizes these desires. In this paper, I have only

provided a sketch for the defence of a universal desire for modernization and have not had space to construct a defence for the notion of a universal desire for recognition, since my primary aim has been to show that the idea of a universal geist can be reconciled with Baudrillard's ideas about the recycling of history. For a fuller defence of the legitimacy of Fukuyama's particular conception of what constitutes the geist it would be necessary to examine Fukuyama's *The End of History and The Last Man* in much greater depth.⁵¹

This paper has been working toward the conclusion that Baudrillard's theory of the recycling of history provides valuable insights for thinking about time and history. However, I have also argued that it may be possible to conceive of a universal mechanism behind history, based on the idea of a geist driving human beings – the geist being the twin desires for economic development and recognition. Thus, it is possible to construct a teleological history, since human history is following a determined course, where the geist behind history is seeking to be become actual that which it is potentially.⁵² Baudrillard's theories of time and history can enhance how we think through the complexity of the movement of history, but his theories can be seen as something which can co-exist and enhance, rather than overturn, the idea of a teleological history.

⁵¹ See: Fukuyama, EHLM.

⁵² The idea that history is the process whereby the geist becomes actual that which it is potentially is particularly evident in Hegel's *The Philosophy of History*. See: Hegel, G. W. F., The Philosophy of History, (New York: Dover Philosophical Classics, 1956).

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